

Delaware Division of Public Health Confirms First COVID-19 Cases with the UK Variant

DOVER (Jan. 29, 2021) –The Division of Public Health (DPH) announced today the first three confirmed cases of the COVID-19 variant, SARS-CoV-2 B.1.1.7, in Delaware. This variant is the same one that was first discovered in England in December and is also commonly referred to as the UK Variant. Delaware now joins a list of 26 other states reporting cases of the UK variant.

The three individuals, all from New Castle County, share a household and all tested positive for COVID-19 earlier this month. The cases involved two adults ranging in age from 35-64, as well as a child under the age of 10. All three individuals had mild symptoms. The cases were identified through routine surveillance of test specimens performed by the Division of Public Health Laboratory.

The individuals had no known travel exposure, however, they may have been exposed while attending a family gathering to persons who live in other states where the variant has been identified. It was reported that people at the gathering did not consistently wear face coverings or socially distance from one another for long periods of time. Case investigation and contact tracing to identify, inform and monitor anyone who was in close contact with these individuals is ongoing. DPH has also been in close contact with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as it continues to track cases of COVID-19 variants in states.

“While we understand that people may be concerned, it’s

important to know that while preliminary data suggests this variant may spread more easily and quickly than SARS-CoV-2, it is not clear if it may cause more severe illness than the more common coronavirus. It is not entirely surprising news that it is now in Delaware as this variant has appeared in neighboring states over the last month,” said Dr. DPH Director Karyl Rattay. “Our approach and treatments are not any different, but as this new variant is more contagious, it is even more important that we remain vigilant and continue taking the necessary steps to avoid spreading the virus – wear a mask, wash your hands, avoid gatherings.”

Virus mutation is common. This new variant was identified in the United Kingdom in mid-December 2020. As public health experts continue to study this new variant, they expect that all currently available diagnostic tests will detect the variant, and that the current COVID-19 vaccines, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, will remain effective against it as well. , Preliminary data suggests the UK variant, as well as Brazilian and South African variants, may spread more easily and quickly which could lead to increased cases. On Thursday, the CDC announced the first case of the South African variant in the U.S. has been identified in South Carolina. According to a White House press briefing Wednesday, Minnesota has the country’s first case of the Brazilian variant.

DPH continues to remind Delawareans that they help reduce the spread of COVID-19 by:

- Washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
- Covering any coughs or sneezes with your elbow, not your hands.
- Cleaning surfaces frequently.
- Delawareans over the age of 18 are also encouraged to download COVID Alert DE, Delaware’s free exposure notification app to help protect your neighbors while

ensuring your privacy. Download the app on the App Store or Google Play.

If you believe you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, or have symptoms of illness, make sure to distance yourself from others, particularly vulnerable populations. Older adults and people of any age with serious underlying medical conditions – including serious heart conditions, chronic lung conditions, including moderate to severe asthma, severe obesity and those who are immunocompromised, including through cancer treatment – may have a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Information about testing events, including community testing sites, permanent fixed testing sites, and free-standing sites operated by the health care systems and hospitals, are listed on the testing section of the Delaware coronavirus website at de.gov/gettested.

Additional information about COVID-19 vaccine rollout is available at de.gov/covidvaccine. Questions can be directed to the Vaccine Call Center at 1-833-643-1715. People who are deaf or hard of hearing should call 2-1-1 or text their ZIP code to 898-211. Individuals can email their questions concerning the vaccine to Vaccine@Delaware.gov.

Individuals with general questions about COVID-19 should call Delaware 2-1-1, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing can text their ZIP code to 898-211, or email delaware211@uwde.org. Hours of operation are 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Friday; 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Medically related questions regarding testing, symptoms, and health-related guidance can be submitted by email at DPHCall@delaware.gov.

DPH will continue to update the public as more information becomes available. For the latest on Delaware's response, go to de.gov/coronavirus.